



“Awareness & Acceptance of Pricing”

The “Awareness & Acceptance of Pricing” project

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), in partnership with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is conducting a research and analysis project to advance pricing and tolling ideas in the Puget Sound region. The project will explore public awareness and acceptance of pricing and tolling operational approaches.

What is the purpose of the project?

The Washington State Transportation Commission’s Tolling Study (2006) concluded that “...Washington should use tolling to encourage effective use of the transportation system and provide a supplementary source of transportation funding.” The Commission’s study also revealed that the public has little understanding of how tolling, and in particular pricing, works and that this lack of public understanding may hinder the potential acceptance of pricing and tolling in the state.

The “Awareness & Acceptance of Pricing” project will explore ways to advance pricing and tolling ideas. Project goals are to find better ways to communicate with the public about how pricing may work in the near and mid-term and to listen and learn from the public about what works best from their view point. The “user’s” perception of benefits and problems will be a major focus of the project.

How will the project be conducted?

The “Awareness & Acceptance of Pricing” project is a series of interactive research, testing, and analyses rounds. With the technical assistance from tolling and communications consultants, WSDOT and PSRC will identify a range of pricing and tolling interest areas that are key to advancing pricing and tolling concepts in the Puget Sound region. Each round will be designed to test the public’s awareness and/or acceptance of specific pricing and tolling issues. The issues may vary from broad policy to mundane technical issues. In refining the interest areas and issues, the project will conduct limited facility based design analysis.

Each round will be generally sequential, each building off the results and findings of prior rounds and each round addressing one or more related interest area. Each round will be conducted in three steps:

First: Refine scope of issues.

Second: Identify appropriate communications testing methodologies and conduct testing. The methodologies will include marketing, public relations, opinion testing, and other communications approaches.

Third: Analysis and feedback. The findings from each round will be incorporated into the next round and will be used to further develop future pricing and tolling policies and projects by WSDOT, PSRC, and other transportation agencies.

Following each round, findings and recommendations will be provided. At the end of the project a combined report of findings and documentation will be published.

What is the project schedule?

The project will be conducted between November 2006 and February 2008. It is expected that each round will average between 2 and 4 months in duration. The timing of individual rounds may overlap.

The budget for the project is \$935,000. Funding is provided by the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) Value Pricing Pilot Program.

What is the FHWA Value Pricing Pilot Program?

The Value Pricing Pilot (VPP) program was initially authorized in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and renewed with the passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

The VPP program encourages implementation and evaluation of value pricing pilot projects to manage congestion on highways through tolling and other pricing mechanisms. The program is limited to 15 states. \$12 million was authorized for each of FYs 2006 through 2009.

Previous Washington State projects that have received VPP grants are:

- ***SR 167 HOT Lanes Pilot Project*** (WSDOT).
- ***“Choices”*** (Puget Sound Regional Council).
- ***Parking Cash-Out and Pricing in King County*** (King County Metro 2004).
- ***Cash-Out of Cars in King County*** (City of Seattle, 2004).

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